



Irene Dingel, Robert Kolb, Nicole Kuroepka, and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *Philip Melancthon: Theologian in Classroom, Confession, and Controversy* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 2012.

The present volume is a member of the series “Refo500 Academic Studies” published by V&R for Refo500, a scholarly consortium devoted to the study of the Reformation in its various manifestations. The series has already produced several fine volumes and this present contribution certainly is at home in their learned company.

Comprised of three major segments, *Philip Melancthon in Classroom*, *Philip Melancthon in Confession*, and *Philip Melancthon in Controversy*, the collection of essays is prefaced by an introduction and concludes with the requisite indices. It also features copious annotations (in the form of footnotes) which are loaded with additional source materials and references.

Essays include but are not limited to ‘*The Biblical Commentaries of Philip Melancthon*’ by Timothy Wengert (pp. 43-76), ‘*Melancthon’s Efforts for Unity between the Fronts: The Frankfurt Recess*’ by Irene Dingel (pp. 123-140), ‘*Philip Melancthon and the Origins of the “Three Causes” (1533-1535): An Examination of the Roots of the Controversy over the Freedom of the Will*’ by Timothy Wengert (pp. 183-208), and ‘*The Critique of Melancthon’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper by his “Gnesio-Lutheran” Students*’ by Robert Kolb (pp. 236-262).

Previous to each section the editors have supplied explanatory materials. Each contributor is perfectly suited to help us understand the ‘Teacher of Germany’ in new and interesting ways, having devoted themselves to the subject for many collective years.

Especially noteworthy, though, and rising to the top as the ‘cream of the crop’ are the contributions by Timothy Wengert. I have never learned so much about Melancthon in such a short time as I have from Wengert’s essays here included. For instance, readers may be unaware that according to the Polish reformer John a Lasco, 1500 people attended Melanchthon’s lectures on the Bible (p. 43). Readers may also be unaware of the fact that Melanchthon was a diligent biblical exegete and wrote commentaries and lectures on huge portions of the text.

Readers may also not know that Melanchthon equated the biblical ‘gift of tongues’ with eloquence (p. 44) or that he suffered with a slight speech impediment (p. 49). Or that he wrote commentaries on both Old and New Testament texts including Malachi and Matthew (pp.60ff).

Even more interestingly, readers may be unaware that Melanchthon saw the various editions of his *Loci* not as doctrinally different but simply as expressions intended to clarify and defend what was at the moment central (p. 190).

Melancthon the theologian/ systematician cannot be separated from Melanchthon the exegete and Professor and Grammarian. His work was, so far as he was concerned, a unified whole and his emphasis on Law and Gospel the rational and natural exposition of the centrality of salvation and Christ’s deliverance of his people from the consequences of sin.

Accordingly,

... for Melanchthon the law’s proper function was to put to death and terrify (p. 195).

Wengert’s exegesis of Melanchthon allows us to see a Reformer driven by a sense of duty and responsibility and not a man simply cowering in the shadow of Luther wishing with all his heart that he could feel forgiven. Melanchthon, in other words, stands on his own and is portrayed nearly independently of Luther (though naturally the intersection of their work also has bearing on Melanchthon’s life and teaching).

All of this is not to suggest that Kolb and Dingel and Kuropka, the other contributors to this extraordinary volume, also do not teach us much, because they do. But Wengert’s work is so exceptional as to deserve proper praise.

I recommend most heartily, sincerely, and joyfully this volume to students of the Reformation, students of the history of the Church more broadly, students of the German Reformation, students of Melanchthon, and general readers looking for a volume from which they might learn a great deal about one of the Reformation’s ‘shadow’ figures. For, if the truth were told, what most Christians (and historians) know about Philip Melanchthon could fit on a matchbook cover.

Expand your knowledge and take in hand this volume and you will gain an appreciation for Melanchthon which may well rival your appreciation of Luther, Calvin, or even Zwingli himself.

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